THIS STORY BEGAN MONDAY AND WILL END SATURDAY.

HER HEART'S DESIRE

BY CHARLES GARVICE

BY PERMISSION OF GEO MUNRO'S SONS

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTER.

Decima Deane is loved by Lord Gaunt, a man of unsavory reputation. Gaunt, years before, had, under an assumed name, married an adventuress. By bribing her brother, Martin Thorpe, he had later eluded her. Under Decima's influence Gaunt reforms. Realizing that he cannot marry Decima, he leaves her and goes to London, where her brother Bobby has fallen under the influence of Thorpe and his sister. A promoter named Maurice has a hold on Decima's father.

To save her father Decima promises to marry Mershon. She goes to London to meet her brother, who lives with Gaunt. There she encounters Gaunt. As they are talking, Gaunt's wife enters. Decima hides in the next room.

After an angry scene with Laura, Gaunt goes away. He has cut his hand on a rusty key and his shirt-front is stained with blood. A young gambler named Trevor enters, quarrels with Laura, murders her and escapes.

Gaunt is suspected of the crime. Ignorant of this, he ships for Africa. The ship is wrecked. Gaunt is picked up by a yacht, and learns for the first time the charge against him.

CHAPTER V.

The Daring of the Brave.

THE news of the wreck of the "Pevensey Castle" did not reach London until some days after the sad event; but when it did, it created a sensation only inferior to that which had been caused by the murder in Prince's Mansions.

The boats had reached the harbor of Mogador in safety, and the rescued passengers had given a full and touching account of the founding of the ill-fated vessel and the heroic conduct of the captain and Lord Gaunt. That they had both been drowned, no one seemed to entertain any doubt, and on the principle of speaking nothing but good of the dead, Lord Gaunt's crime was forgotten for the moment in admiration for his heroism.

To Decima, lying white and wan in the darkened room, no tidings of the outside world were permitted to reach. She had recovered consciousness, but she lay 'twixt life and death, in that condition of mind and body which resembles stupor.

Later in the day Bobby came in. He was terribly upset, and scarcely master of himself.

"You've heard the news, Lady Pauline?" he said, as he entered the drawing-room.

"Yes," she said. "It is terrible; and yet"—

"Ah, yes; but who is to tell her?" he demanded.

"I and you," she said, with her usual courage.

Bobby kissed her, and so hid his face for a moment. Lady Pauline stood on the other side of the bed, grave and self-possessed.

"Robert has something to tell you, Decie," she said. "Are you sure you are strong enough to bear it? It is—sad and painful news; but we think it will come better from us, who love you, than in any other way."

Decima looked from one to the other.

"Sad—painful?" she said. Then she sighed. "Yes, tell me, please, Bobby."

Slowly and hesitatingly, and with many pauses, he told her of the murder; and as she listened her face grew whiter and her horror expressed itself in her eyes.

"Oh, poor lady—poor lady!" she breathed. "I—I saw her portrait. She was his wife! Oh, Bobby!"

"And—and at the inquest they brought a verdict of wilful murder against—against Lord Gaunt," he said, thickly.

Decima raised herself on her elbow.

"Against—against Lord Gaunt! They could not!" she said. "Murder! He could not have done it! I—I know that he could not! Where is he? What does he say? Oh—wait a moment; my head is burning!—Aunt Pauline, you do not believe it?"

"No, no!" said Lady Pauline; "I do not think him guilty!"

"Thank you—oh, thank you, auntie!" said Decima, faintly. "Tell me—tell me it all again! Let me think!" She put her hand to her brow and closed her eyes.

Bobby held his breath. Lady Pauline saturated a pocket handkerchief with eau de Cologne and bathed Decima's brow. She waved it aside impatiently.

"I am not going to faint. I am quite strong. Where is Lord Gaunt? What does he say?"

Bobby held his breath.

"Lord Gaunt—Decie, dear, you'll be brave, won't you? Lady Pauline and I think you ought to hear it from us, not by chance and from strangers."

"Yes, yes!" she broke in, with a man. "Tell me—tell me! It would be cruel to keep it from me. I—I want to know!"

"Gaunt went by the Pevensey Castle On the morning after—after the murder"—

"Yes," breathed Decima. "He said he was going to Africa! Well? Oh, tell me all! I can bear it, indeed I can."

—"And—and," faltered Bobby, "the vessel was lost. It foundered off the coast of Africa"—

Decima raised herself and looked at him, with something in her eyes which Bobby will never forget while life lasts.

—"And Gaunt—give her something, Lady Pauline, brandy or—something!" he broke off.

But Decima waved a refusal of the offered glass.

"Tell me—tell me everything!" she panted.

Bobby struggled with the choking feeling in his throat.

"Gaunt—and—and the captain remained on board after the rest had left, and—and—and Gaunt"—

Decima fell back on the pillows, and for a minute or two remained motionless and speechless; then she opened her eyes, and the hopeless misery and despair in them brought the tears to Lady Pauline's.

"And—and he is dead?" came from Decima's white lips.

Bobby bowed his head.

"Yes; I am afraid—they all think—he was lost. He—he behaved like a hero. I'll—I'll read the newspaper account to you when you are able"—

"Now! now!" she said in a hollow whisper; and Bobby, as if he could not resist her, drew out the paper and read the account. Decima listened with fixed eyes and bated breath to the statement of one of the passengers who had left the wreck in the last boat.

"You see!" said Bobby, struggling with the choking in his throat, "he gave up his place in the boat to the man Jackson. He kept the passengers in order, and—and stood by the captain till—till—the last! Decie, it—it is just what Gaunt would do, isn't it?"

She opened her eyes upon him with a wild despair.

"Yes; it is like him," she said.

"Decie," murmured Lady Pauline. Decima turned upon her.

"Yes; I wish I had been there! I wish I had died with him!"

Then she closed her eyes and was silent for a moment or two—so long that Lady Pauline thought she had fainted, and went to a table for a restorative; but suddenly Decima opened her eyes and said, with feverish emphasis:

"He is not dead! I know it! He is not dead! If he were I—I should feel it! No, he is not dead!"

Presently she asked them to leave her alone.

Three days afterward they took her down to The Woodbines. Lady Pauline went with her, and she bore the journey very well.

Her father received them in a kind of stupor.

The next day Theodore Mershon called. She insisted on seeing him and telling him that she could never be his wife. He protested his faith in her, his love for her, but she said: "I will tell you, Mr. Mershon. I will tell you because you will then see how—how impossible it was that I should have refrained from sending you my message. I sent to see Bobby"—

"I know," he said, eagerly.

—"And Lord Gaunt came in."

As she spoke his name her eyes closed for an instant and her hand slid along the edge of the wall as if she were seeking some support.

"And you were together there," he said, nodding gloomily. "What—what passed between you? Don't tell me if you don't like. I'm content to let bygones be bygones, Decima."

"I will tell you," she said. Her lips were quivering, but she steadied them. "Lord Gaunt—told me that he loved me."

Mershon started and his face went black.

"The villain!" he muttered.

Decima's face grew crimson and her eyes flashed. She turned away as if she would not say another word, then suddenly she faced him again.

"He told me that he—loved me. And I"—

Her voice broke for an instant, but she went on painfully:

"I knew then that I had loved him for a long time. I shall love him while life lasts!"

There were no tears in her eyes, and they met his furious gaze unflinchingly, almost as if she did not see him or had forgotten his presence.

"And you can tell me this!" he stammered huskily. "You can confess that you love a man who was married already—a man who has committed a dastardly murder?"

Decima's hand went to her heart.

"He did not do it!" she said. "I know it!"

"I—I suppose you have counted the cost of—of this rupture of our engagement?" he stammered. "You don't forget that your father owes me a large sum of money? Perhaps your brother—your precious brother," he sneered—"has made the consequences pretty plain to you?"

"Yes, I understand," she said in a low voice. "I am sorry—yes, I am sorry that I cannot marry you. But I cannot! It would have been hard before, but now"— She turned away as if she felt that it would be impossible for him to understand what that now meant, and Mershon, with an almost audible oath, left the room.

Mrs. Sherborne met him at the door of The Firs with a telegram. He snatched the telegram from her hand and tore open the envelope.

She was going back to the drawing-room, when she heard him utter a cry, a cry of rage and baffled fury, and she turned back.

Mershon was leaning against the wall, glaring at the telegram. He raised his head presently and his lips moved, but no sound came. The telegram fell from his hand, and, in fear and trembling, she went forward and picked it up. He did not prevent her, and she read the wire. It was from Mr. Gilsby, the lawyer, and it ran thus:

"All D's bills met. Some one has undertaken to discharge all his liabilities. Will write."

Mershon seemed to awake from his stupor, and, snatching the telegram from her, he went upstairs. She watched him for a moment, then her lips moved, and she breathed softly:

"Thank God!"

Mershon, as he went unsteadily up the stairs, holding by the balustrade and stumbling now and again like a man smitten with palsy, had no need to ask who the "some one" was. He knew that Gaunt had stretched out a hand, from the grave as it were, to shield and protect the girl he had loved.

The Sea Wolf landed Lord Gaunt at Southampton. He hurried to London, and escaped arrest because the police had given him up for lost. On his way to a hotel where he had been known of old he came upon his fellow-passenger on the Pevensey Castle, Jackson, for whom he had given up his place in the last boat. Jackson had been landed only a few days before at Portsmouth. He looked wretchedly ill. Drink and a cough which exposure at the time of the shipwreck had brought on were fast sapping his vitality.

Gaunt felt that he owed this man whose life he had saved a helping hand, and took him to his hotel. They talked after a dinner neither enjoyed.

"You do not eat," said Jackson.

"No, and yet this is the last dinner I shall eat in freedom," said Gaunt. "It may be that the significance of my name has not struck you. I am Edward Barnard Gaunt, charged with the murder of my wife in Prince's Mansions."

Jackson sat down the glass untasted which he had been raising to his lips. His manner was so indicative of surprise, amazement, that Gaunt stared at him.

"Do you mean to say that you have not seen a paper—a London paper?" he asked.

Jackson moistened his lips with his tongue.

"No," he said; "I—I haven't seen a paper. I—I know nothing about it. There was no paper on board the ship that took us off from Mogador."

Gaunt sighed.

"It's soon told," he said. "A woman was murdered at one of the flats at Prince's Mansions— What is the matter?" he broke off as Jackson half rose from his seat.

"Nothing—nothing," said Jackson, with the hollow cough which Gaunt had noticed several times during the meal.

"She was murdered—stabbed with a Persian dagger. The rooms in which she was found were my rooms. The dagger was mine. The coat thrown over her—a fur coat easy to identify—was my coat, and"—he paused—"the woman was—my wife."

"Yours!" ejaculated Jackson.

He gripped the table with both hands and stared at Gaunt with his hollow, bloodshot eyes with a gaze half of amazement, half of terror.

"Yes, mine," said Gaunt, leaning back in his chair and gazing moodily at the tablecloth. "She was my wife. I married her, thinking her all that was good, and pure, and innocent. I loved her—but that's a different part of the story. The salient facts are that she was found—murdered—in my rooms. That I had been there"—

"You—you had been there?" ejaculated Jackson.

"Yes," said Gaunt. He had almost forgotten his auditor, and was communing with himself. "I had been there. She came in while I was there and there was a scene. I dare say I threatened her—God knows she tried me hardly enough!—and I was very likely overheard by the servants. In short, Mr. Jackson, the evidence is very black against me. I tell you all this because you may object to continue an acquaintance with a man who lies under so heavy a charge, and whom you will probably think guilty."

Jackson leaned back in his chair, and, with his head sunk between his shoulders, coughed appallingly, and stared at Gaunt.

"If you'd like to say 'good-by' and go to another hotel," said Gaunt, "pray do so. I shall not be offended or deem your desire to cut my acquaintance an unreasonable one."

"She was your wife?" said Jackson in a hollow voice and apparently ignoring Gaunt's suggestion. "Your wife?"

"Yes," said Gaunt, with a sigh. "And when I think of her lying dead I can only remember that I once loved her, and I can forgive her all the misery she caused me."

Again he spoke more to himself than to Jackson, who sank deeply in his chair, looked a ghastly object and scarcely capable of understanding the case; but presently, without taking his bloodshot eyes from Gaunt's face, he said:

"If the evidence against you is so strong, why in the devil's name did you come back? You might have got off in that yacht—and—there would have been no more bother."

Gaunt raised his eyebrows slightly.

"If I had been guilty I suppose that is what I should have done," he said; "but I am innocent. Of course I do not insist upon your believing me"—

Jackson made a movement with his hand.

—"And being innocent, of course I have come back to face the thing. What else could I do?" he added, simply.

Jackson's eyes wandered round the room, then returned with their fixed stare to Gaunt's face.

"You take it coolly!" he said, hoarsely and with an oath. "Suppose—suppose they find you guilty?"

"Then I shall not be the first man who has suffered innocently," said Gaunt, gravely.

Jackson got up from his chair with difficulty and went and leaned against the mantel shelf. The short journey brought on his cough again, and he bent double and put his handkerchief to his lips. As he took it away Gaunt saw that there was blood upon it.

"I'm afraid you're very ill, Mr. Jackson," he said. Don't you think you'd better go to bed and let me send for the doctor?"

Jackson waived the suggestion away impatiently.

"I'm all right," he said, sullenly. "Who—who did this murder?" he asked, hoarsely.

Gaunt shook his head.

"I have not the least idea. I know nothing of my wife's life since I left her, or her recent movements; and I suppose the police were so assured of my guilt that they didn't deem it necessary to look in any other direction."

A curious gleam shot for a moment into Jackson's eyes as he bent over the fire.

"The police are fools!" he said.

(To Be Continued.)

MANSFIELD, SOTHERN AND FAVERSHAM CHALLENGED TO A COMBAT,

With or Without Music, by "Tom" Leigh, Octogenarian and an Actor of the Old, Old School.

The Old-Timer's Contempt for the Little Dandies Who Catch the Matinee Girls of the Present Day—The Actresses of Forty Years Ago and Those of the Twentieth Century—Small Salaries and Hard Work.

EIGHTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD "Tom" Leigh pooh-poohs the stage idols of to-day and here issues a "defi" to the greatest of our romantic actors to meet him in a stage combat and fight either to music or without music.

The veteran walks the Bowery every bright day, his picturesque white head held erect, his cane carried jauntily in the manner of a broadsword and in his undimmed old eyes a far-away expression, as though he saw the gaudy thoroughfare as it was fifty years ago, when it used to be New York's great Rialto. Few are aware that he is Thomas J. Leigh, more familiarly called "Tom," the oldest living actor in America, who will celebrate his eighty-first birthday on July 15.

The history of "Tom Leigh" reads like a romance. So entangled is his life story with those of Junius Brutus Booth, Edwin Forrest, Edwin Booth, Charlotte Cushman and the geniuses of those days that he might write a history of the American stage in the form of personal reminiscences.

The old actor lives a quiet life far away from the glamour of the footlights in a little flat at No. 118 West One Hundred and Thirty-fifth street with his wife, once Kitty Wright, the actress, and his granddaughter, a young girl of twenty.

"You see the old horse hasn't forgotten all his tricks yet," he remarked as the photographer snapped him as he laughed, after telling a funny story. "Done already? How quickly they do it in these days. Now, in my time I should have had to hold that pose for several minutes before a photographer could have caught it on paper. They say I look like Chauncey Depew—call me his double, you know. See the resemblance?" and Mr. Leigh turned his profile, giving his features a Chauncey Depew expression that made him the living image of the famous after-dinner speaker. "Wish we had made a practice of giving 'imitations' in my day," he remarked, "for if Chauncey had been as popular then as he is now I might have made a fortune. There's more money in vaudeville imitations to-day than there is in 'Hamlet,' I believe. But then there isn't any acting to-day anyhow. Why, your greatest stars can't fight a combat to music.

"Sir, I'll bet you two to one that I could beat Richard Mansfield, E. H. Sothern, William Faversham or any other prominent romantic actor of to-day fighting a combat. They don't seem to know how to handle a sword now—not so as to excite the pit, anyway. I've fought combats for ten minutes straight, the music playing all the time, and never missed a note. Didn't dare to miss a note, sir. If you did the pit'd know it and hiss and howl till you caught up with the measure again.

"Ten minutes, not counting the encore, was the time limit for a real lively combat, with the pit howling with admiration all the time. Sometimes you could give 'em fifteen minutes of it, but they never would stand twenty. Nowadays it's spit, spat, nip, tuck, and there you are! They fight like French dancing masters, these modern actors in their frock coats and buttonhole bouquets.

"As for the comedians—ah, well, comedy isn't comedy any longer. Most comedians nowadays think they are funny if they wear a frock coat backside foremost and cultivate a funny wink. It wouldn't have gone in the time of the pit, though. You had to be funny out loud then, and the louder you were the funnier it was. If you played a drunken part you had to be rip-roaring drunk, not merely mildly and foolishly intoxicated. The pit would have no half-way measures, sir.

"My best parts were all drunken character parts, and I reckon I knew how to play 'em. There was the drunken lawyer in 'Miriam's Crime'—great play, 'Miriam's Crime,' sir—how I used to play that! Nobody ever could play it like me. I remember once the pit got so excited that they began to believe I was really drunk and wanted to carry me out. When I stood up straight and looked hard at them and spoke to them in a perfectly steady voice, one little urchin cried out:

"'Why, de ole bloke ain't drunk at all!' and then the house came down and I got the ovation of my life.

"As for work, those little dandies up on the Rialto nowadays don't understand the meaning of the word. I reckon they'd faint, sir, if they had to do as we did, play three dramas and two farces in a night, with a couple of ballet dances in between, and change the bill every night in the week. Many's the night I've played until 1.30, changing my character with every scene from leading heavy to utility and back again to first old man.

"Next morning I'd be on hand at rehearsal at 10 o'clock, too. If we weren't on hand we'd get docked, and when you consider that the highest salary paid was $20, you will see, sir, that being docked was no pastime.

"Salaries in those days were proportionately as small as the work was heavy compared with to-day. Why, admission to the pit was only a 'levy (12 1-2 cents), and you could get into a box for 50 cents. Five hundred dollars was the biggest house I ever played to. There was about $1 a week difference between the salary of the leading man and the juvenile, and so on down to the general utility.

"We couldn't be finicky about our parts, either. I remember once a young man with modern ideas complained to Forrest that his part didn't fit him temperamentally.

"'All right,' said Mr. Forrest, 'get rid of your temperament. We don't want any temperament in this business; just plain acting and the ability to mind when given orders.' And you bet that youngster disposed of his temperament next morning.

"As for the women, they were more business-like than those gay young ladies I notice to-day wearing big hats covered with flowers and ogling at the front row. My wife, who used to do all the chambermaids, made all her own dresses. So did most of the actresses, in fact, and they didn't have time for much Johnny-at-the-stage-door nonsense. There was the mother of Fanny Herring, for instance. She acted until 1.30 the night Fanny was born. Little Fanny made her appearance at 3.30, and five days afterward Mrs. Herring was playing again with Fanny in her arms doing 'the baby' in the farce.

"Do you think a woman like that would have much time to ogle the pit over the footlights or to go to bachelor suppers? No, indeed. We married the girls we loved and stayed true to 'em, and they were nice, true, hard-working little women. Katie, my wife, and I were the handsomest couple on the Bowery, and we are yet, ha, ha!" and the old actor's eyes twinkled with a light which fifty years has only seemed to make the brighter."

Mr. Leigh has been on the stage since his eighteenth year. He began his career in Mrs. Sanders's company, Holliday Street Theatre, Baltimore, and played with all the great stars.

"Forrest I liked best of all. He was the wittiest, the cleverest and the best tempered. I played with old Junius Brutus Booth, too. I think he was what you would call nowadays a little daffy. He used to get 'spells.' Sometimes they would come on him in the middle of a combat, and he would leap out into the audience and chop at somebody.

"Eddie Booth had spells, too, but they were not so violent, and nobody except the actors knew about it. I remember one he had at Winter Garden in Buffalo. He had to leave the stage and didn't appear for a week. People said he was drunk, but he was never that in his life. He was just 'queer,' like all the Booths. They had so much genius it toppled over to the other side.

"Charlotte Cushman was as great a woman as she was an actress. I was pretty young and green when I played with her. She mothered me as she did all the rest, and taught me my 'business' and how to say my lines in a way that brought me a round of applause every time. She seemed to be able to put the spirit in you when you didn't have it naturally.

"After I tired of acting I took to managing. I had the stage management of the Holliday Street Theatre in Baltimore for a while, and also of Niblo's Garden in New York and of the National Theatre in Boston, but none of them was so dear to me as the old Bowery. I reckon actors were the same then, sir, as they are now about New York—no place else feels like home.

"Well, I must go home now. If I'm late Katie Wright Leigh will have some sort of lesson to teach me. I came in late four nights in succession week before last and each time a bit gayer than I ought to be. The fourth night I found Katie down in the sitting room playing solitaire. I noticed something queer about her and all of a sudden it came to me that she was wearing an old stage costume that I hadn't seen for forty years. It was a widow's garb.

"'Madame,' said I, 'hic-for-whom-hic are you in mourning?'

"'Sir,' said she, 'for my late husband.'

"I took the hint, you bet, and went quietly to bed. I haven't touched a drop since. Katie knows how to manage a man all right.

"I'll be eighty-one on July 15. Joe Jefferson can't beat that, can he? There's just one beautiful man who can and that's 'Old Man Marsh,' the father of the Marsh children. None of 'em his own—he picked 'em up here and there all over the country and made 'em. Now he's in the Actors' Home. Old Man Marsh is eighty-six and he feels it. As for me I'm making plans for forty years ahead. Going to Paris in 1943. They won't ring down the drop on me for many years to come. But Katie might, if I should keep her waiting. Good morning, sir, good morning."

TELLING A FUNNY STORY.

"TOM" LEIGH, AS HE IS TO-DAY.

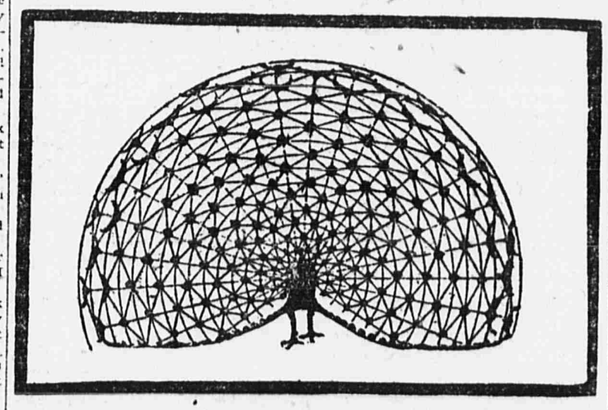
LEIGH'S CHALLENGE TO A COMBAT.

If while my good health continues any of our prominent actors of to-day, and especially our romantic actors, Richard Mansfield, E. H. Sothern, William Faversham, or any other, wishes to meet me in a stage combat with or without music, I am ready to show them how we did the trick forty years ago. Stage combats of to-day are but child's play compared with those of my day.

THOMAS J. LEIGH.

"Sir, I'll bet you two to one that I could beat Richard Mansfield, E. H. Sothern, William Faversham, or any romantic actor of to-day fighting a combat. They don't seem to know how to handle a sword now—not so as to excite the pity, anyway."—Mr. Leigh in interview.

GEOMETERY IN A PEACOCK'S TAIL.



Ernest Thompson-Seton has photographed the lordly peacock with his tail feathers spread, to demonstrate that its geometrical arrangement is perfect. This is one of the pictures Mr. Thompson-Seton presents in his recent work, "Art Anatomy of Animals."